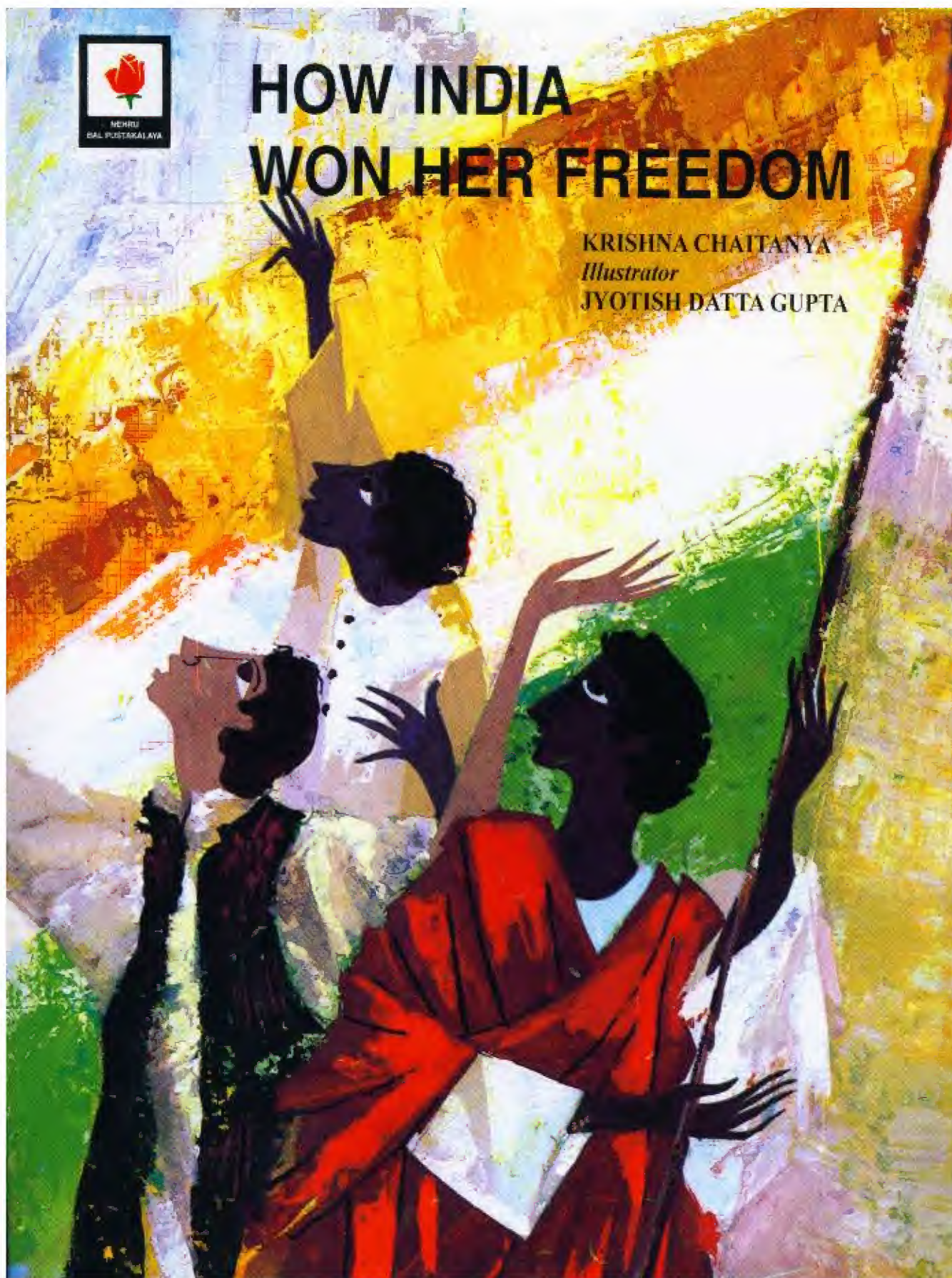




HOW INDIA WON HER FREEDOM

KRISHNA CHAITANYA
Illustrator
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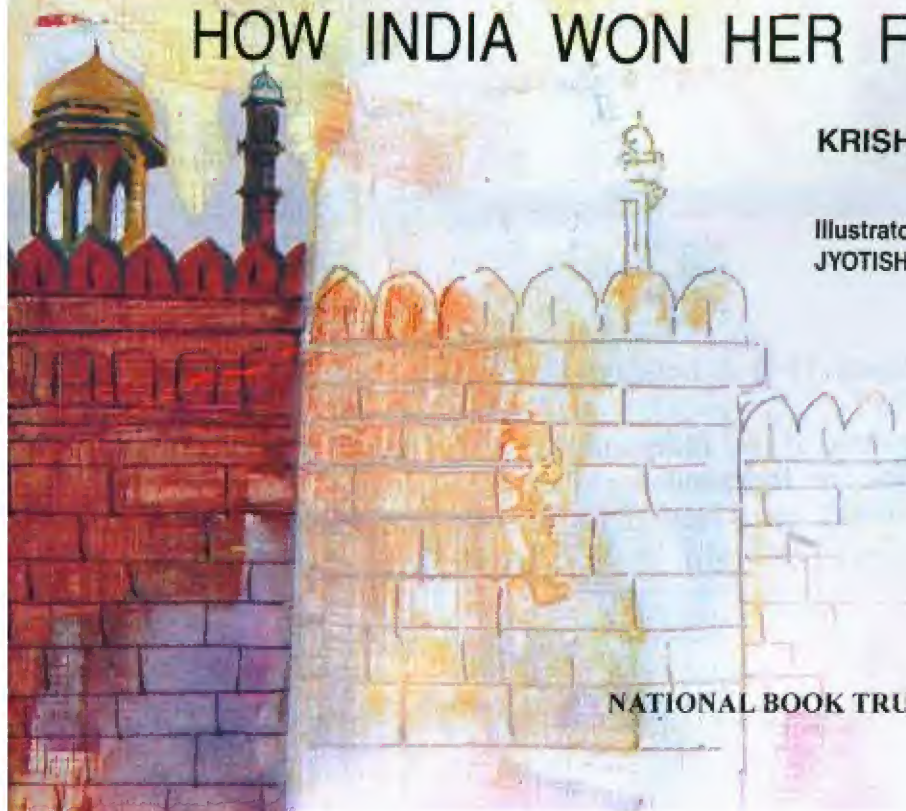
NEHRU BAL PUSTAKALAYA



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NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA





August 15 is a holiday.
Why?

Because it is Independence Day.

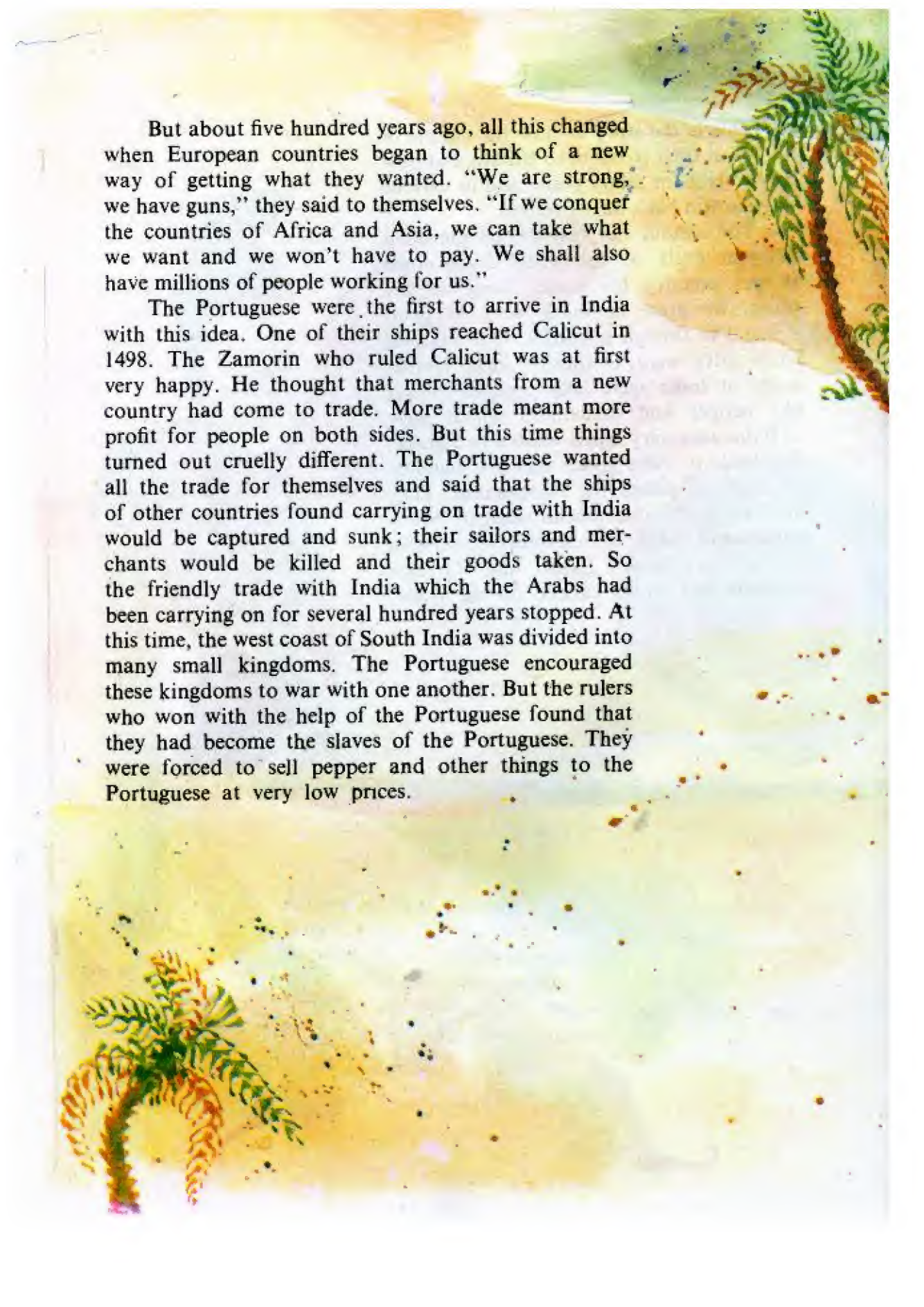
What is Independence Day?

The day on which India became independent, free in 1947.
Before 1947 why wasn't India free?

This is the story of how the people of India lost their freedom to Britain and how they fought for many years, and in various ways to win back their freedom.

Throughout our history, people from different parts of the world have come to our country for trade. Some of the things we grew or made were in great demand in foreign countries. Our silk and handicrafts were famous; cotton textiles made in India were also popular. Spices like pepper and cardamom which grew in India were very much wanted in Europe. The trade in these goods was first handled by a people called the Phoenicians. They lived on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa and were the cleverest merchants in ancient times. Later, the Greeks, Romans and Arabs carried on the trade.





But about five hundred years ago, all this changed when European countries began to think of a new way of getting what they wanted. "We are strong, we have guns," they said to themselves. "If we conquer the countries of Africa and Asia, we can take what we want and we won't have to pay. We shall also have millions of people working for us."

The Portuguese were the first to arrive in India with this idea. One of their ships reached Calicut in 1498. The Zamorin who ruled Calicut was at first very happy. He thought that merchants from a new country had come to trade. More trade meant more profit for people on both sides. But this time things turned out cruelly different. The Portuguese wanted all the trade for themselves and said that the ships of other countries found carrying on trade with India would be captured and sunk; their sailors and merchants would be killed and their goods taken. So the friendly trade with India which the Arabs had been carrying on for several hundred years stopped. At this time, the west coast of South India was divided into many small kingdoms. The Portuguese encouraged these kingdoms to war with one another. But the rulers who won with the help of the Portuguese found that they had become the slaves of the Portuguese. They were forced to sell pepper and other things to the Portuguese at very low prices.



When the people of the other countries of Europe saw that the Portuguese were getting very rich and very quickly too, they also wanted to become rich by using the same unfair means. So Dutch merchant ships arrived in India; then came the French; and lastly came the British. Greedy people hate to share. Naturally, all these foreigners began to fight among themselves because each one wanted all the trade for himself. In the end it was the English who won.

The English who came to India belonged to the East India Company which was a company of merchants. Now, merchants should not keep soldiers or fight to get trade. But when the East India Company got permission to build godowns at places like Surat, Madras, Calcutta and Bombay, they built forts and the number of soldiers they kept increased year by year.



Siraj-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Bengal, rightly felt that merchants, especially from a foreign country, should not have soldiers, guns and forts. He ordered the Company to take down the guns on their fort at Calcutta. They refused. War began. In the battle of Plassey in 1757, the Nawab was defeated and killed. Before the battle the British had bribed the Nawab's general to betray him. So they put the general on the throne. After some time when they had got everything they wanted from him, the British got rid of him and made another man the Nawab. At first the new Nawab did whatever they wanted him to do. But later on he got so angry with their greed and insulting behaviour that with the help of the Moghul Emperor at Delhi he decided to fight the British. But the British army was too strong. The Nawab and his men lost. The British now demand-



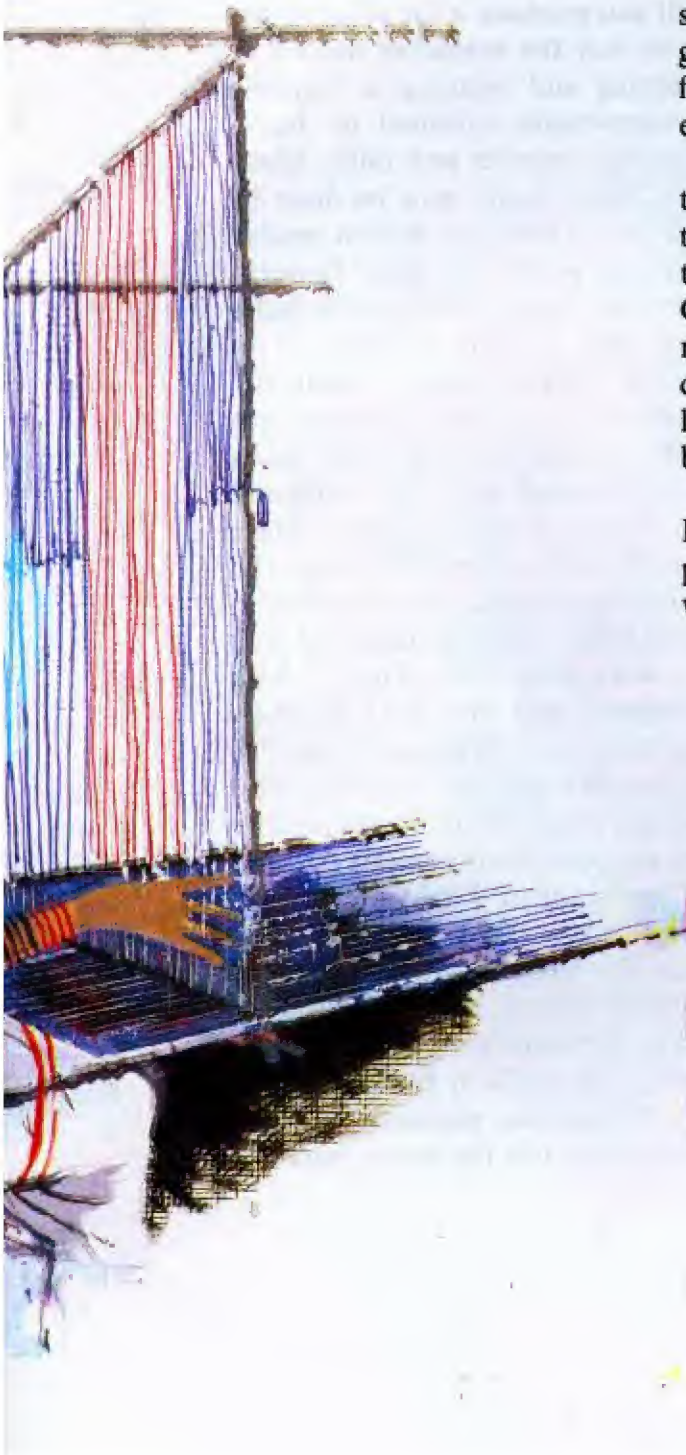


ed that they should be allowed to rule Bengal along with the Nawab. The Emperor had to agree and he gave them the Diwani of Bengal. Thus British merchants became rulers of the Indian people.

In the next hundred years, the Company gained control over more and more regions. They plundered every class of the Indian people and taxed the peasants heavily. They increased their wealth enormously in various ways. For example, indigo, a colouring matter obtained from the indigo plant, is very valuable in dyeing cloth. So no one was allowed to trade in indigo except the British. They compelled peasants to grow indigo in their fields even when the peasants wanted very much to grow wheat or rice for food. The peasants were then forced to sell the indigo to the British traders at a price fixed by the British themselves.

Cotton-weavers of Surat and silk-weavers of Bengal had to sell all that they produced to British merchants and, again, the East India Company fixed the prices. These prices were so low that the poor peasants and weavers sometimes tried to sell their indigo, silk or cotton to others to get a little more money. But when they were caught doing this, they were whip-





ped and sent to jail. Sometimes British planters even set fire to whole villages because some peasants in these villages had sold their goods to others. Workers in the factories set up by the British were equally miserable.

The rulers of the Indian States too were angry because they had to do whatever the British ordered them to. Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of the Company, made a rule that any Indian kingdom, whose ruler died without leaving a son to succeed him, would become part of British territory.

By these unfair means the British increased their wealth and possessions. The way they used this wealth made things harder for India.

Some of you may have seen a handloom; some of you may have seen a textile mill too; all of you must have at least seen pictures of both. A handloom does not cost much but it can produce only a small amount of cloth. A mill can produce a lot of cloth but you need a lot of money to make or buy the machines needed to set up a mill. Till about 1760, spinning and weaving in England were done on small looms. The steam-engine invented by James Watt made it possible for man to set up factories and mills. Many things that man used to do with his hands, could now be done by machine. But to make machines and set up factories Britain needed large sums of money. Neither the British people nor their Government had so much money. But when the wealth plundered in India was sent to England, setting up huge mills became possible.

You may have sometimes heard people talking about the Industrial Revolution. What they mean is just this change from making things, more or less at home, with the help of simple tools like looms to making things in huge factories with big machines. But the factories produce so much that you need a much larger number of people to buy all that is produced by them. Of course, the people of Britain used the cloth their mills produced. But a lot of cloth was still left over. So the British brought their cloth to India and sold it to the Indians. British merchants were given every kind of help to do this. Indian weavers also produced very fine cloth on their handlooms and quite a lot of it was being sold in foreign countries including England. The British did not like this, for anybody who bought Indian cloth would not have the need or the money to buy British cloth. So they ordered that anybody who wanted to send Indian cloth to any country should pay a lot of money to get permission to do so. This was a tax and it was called export duty. The British wanted us only to grow cotton. This they bought at low prices and sent to England. There it was made into cloth, then brought back and sold to Indians at high prices. For the same reason, the British did not like Indian businessmen setting up mills in India to make cloth for Indians. Thus, along with the princes, peasants, workers and weavers, the businessmen in India also felt the heavy hand of the British pushing them down.



The first great revolt against the British was the one that took place in 1857, exactly one hundred years after the battle of Plassey. The sepoys or Indian soldiers in the Company's armies were poorly paid. They could never hope to become officers and they were treated badly by the Britishers. The revolt began with the Indian sepoys



at Meerut turning against the British. It then spread to a vast area, from the Punjab in the North to the Narmada river in the South, from Bihar in the East to Rajputana in the West. All classes of Indians joined the soldiers in the revolt. The leaders of the revolt



too came from all classes and communities. They all accepted Bahadur Shah, the last of the Moghuls, as their Emperor. Among them was Nana Sahib who led the revolt in Kanpur; Tantia Tope who carried on a clever and courageous hide-and-seek war for two years; eighty-year old Kunwar Singh of Bihar; Liaqat Ali of Allahabad who was a school-master and Ahmadullah Shah, a *maulvi* of Faizabad who joined the revolt and led the people. There were women leaders also. Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, rather than surrender, fell fighting to the last and the young Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh came to the battlefield to encourage her troops in the defence of Lucknow against the British.

The revolt was put down with great cruelty. Bahadur Shah was exiled to Burma and imprisoned there and his sons were shot. Hundreds of people were tied to the mouths of cannons and blown up. Thousands of people were hanged. Whole villages were burnt down. But the revolt had also shocked the British people greatly. They decided that the ruling of India should not be left to a company of merchants. The British Government took over and ruled India through Viceroys, who represented the British King or Queen.

But things did not change when the British Government took over from the East India Company. Instead of a company of merchants, officers appointed by the British Government ruled.



They were more efficient in getting what they wanted and ruled strictly for their own benefit and that of their country. They believed that they were superior beings and treated all Indians as inferiors. The British did not want the Indians even to think that they could rule themselves. They took the most cunning and cruel steps to suppress any such thought. But the more firmly the British tried to keep the Indian people under their rule, the more the people wanted to be free. This great desire for freedom was felt by all the people though different people acted in very different ways to achieve it.

Reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy felt that if we wanted freedom we should prove that we deserved it. He wanted Indians to give up their bad customs and habits. He wanted everyone, especially women, to be educated. Vivekananda also felt the same way. He said that Indians had sinned against their own brothers by treating some of them badly. The Indian people thought that they were very religious but Vivekananda said that no one could be truly religious unless he had courage and strength.

Writers protested against British oppression through plays, novels, poems and songs. In 1860, Dinabandhu Mitra published a Bengali play, *Nil Darpan*, which angered the British greatly because it showed their cruelty to the peasants in forcing them to grow indigo and sell it at very low prices.



Vande Mataram, the song we all know, is a freedom poem from *Anand Math*, a novel by Bankim Chandra. Tagore's song, *Jana Gana Mana*, has become our national anthem. It sings of the unity of the people of India. Similarly Subramania Bharati inspired the people of Tamil Nadu with his patriotic songs in Tamil.

Newspapers, especially those in the Indian languages, spoke so strongly against British oppression that in 1874 the British ordered that no newspaper should be published in the Indian languages. Though this order was withdrawn some years later, the British severely punished the editors every time their papers published something they did not like. Surendranath Banerjee was put in jail because he wrote in his paper about the unjust decisions of a British judge.





Thus as the years went by, many kinds of people, in different ways, played a part in making the freedom movement stronger.

But it was the political movement that united all these people and this was born when the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885. Its first meeting was held in Bombay. Leaders came from all parts of India. Besides men of the Hindu community, there were Muslims like Sayani and Tyabji and Parsis like Dadabhai Naoroji and Pherozeshah Mehta, who joined the Indian National Congress and started a movement for the freedom of the country. Many others like Gokhale and Surendranath Banerjea joined the movement as it grew and worked hard to educate the Indian people. In the beginning, till about 1905, the Congress did not openly challenge the British. It pointed out the misery of the Indian people under British rule and asked for reforms. Therefore, some people felt that the Congress leaders were very weak men. But they were wrong. The Congress leaders sincerely believed that the British could be persuaded to change. They boldly pointed out the wrong things the British were doing. In the very first meeting of the Congress, many leaders spoke against the suppression of newspapers. Others were angry with the Government for not taking steps to prevent famines that occurred often and took millions of lives. They said that less money should be spent on the police and more on schools and hospitals. They wanted that members of Municipal Councils should be elected by the people and not appointed by the Government. They demanded that somebody other than the Government should find out how the huge revenues collected from the Indian people were spent. Dadabhai Naoroji devoted all his life to show that the great poverty of India was due to the various ways in which the British robbed the country of its wealth and produce. His writings and speeches made people in India, and even in England, understand how Britain was destroying India.

After 1905 Congress leaders differed among themselves about the way to win freedom. Men like Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai felt that the British would never listen to pleas and, therefore, firmer steps had to be taken. As early as 1889 Tilak had begun writing along these lines in his Marathi paper, the *Kesari*. In 1897 the British had sent

him to jail for eighteen months because he had urged peasants not to pay land taxes to the Government when the crop failed. He once said, "*Swaraj* is my birthright." *Swaraj* means independence. But the more moderate leaders would have been satisfied with a little more say in the working of the government.

By the beginning of this century, the Indian freedom movement had gained strength and most of the educated people were convinced that British rule did no good for India or the Indian people.

It was about this time that Lord Curzon became Viceroy of India. He was proud and arrogant and could not even understand that Indians were as fit to rule themselves as any other people. In fact, he tried in different ways to crush and kill the Indian National Congress and the freedom movement. One of the things he tried to do was to divide the people of Bengal into Hindus and Muslims. He did not want them to live together in one province. He, therefore, divided the big province of Bengal into two. This was called the Partition of Bengal. When the Government did this all the people—not only the people of Bengal, but the people all over the country—protested and told the Government that they would not agree to the partition. The British had tried to divide the people and make them weak but they only succeeded in making the people united and strong. Among the great leaders of this movement were Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Ashwini Kumar Dutta. In fact, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal called for revolution. They wanted the people to rebel and revolt and overthrow the Government. In 1907 the British arrested Lala Lajpat Rai and sent him to prison to Mandalay in Burma.

In spite of the protests of the people, Bengal was partitioned. There was no revolution. The Government put down any sign of opposition with all their strength and might. But that was not the end of the story. Four years later the Partition of Bengal was cancelled.

It is not surprising that many people now felt that violence could be met only by violence. So some of them became revolutionaries and some cruel British officers were murdered.

Khudi Ram Bose who had made an attempt at murder in 1908

was hanged even though he was only fifteen years old. A few revolutionaries tried to make bombs and other weapons in secret. One such group of which some were caught and tried for conspiracy was discovered at Manaktala in Calcutta.

This revolutionary movement never became a strong, big movement but it lasted for many years. The revolutionaries were few but they were very brave. The people did not join their movement but they admired their courage and sacrifice. You must have heard of Bhagat Singh. He and his comrades Sukhdev and Rajguru tried to rouse the people of the Punjab by their acts of heroism. They were arrested and sentenced to death.

Some Indian revolutionaries went abroad and worked for the cause of Indian freedom from foreign countries. They did a great deal by telling the people of Europe and America about the evils of British rule in India. They sought the help of the people of those countries to make India free. One of them was Madam Cama who from 1909 published a journal named *Bande Mataram*, from Geneva. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya set up an Indian Independence Committee in Berlin. Raja Mahendra Pratap, Maulana Barkatullah and Maulana Obeidullah went to Kabul where they formed a provisional government of India.

Punjabi immigrants in America set up the Ghadar party (the word *ghadar* means 'mutiny') and tried to help the revolutionary movement in India. Men like Savarkar and Jatin Mukherjee tried to get guns and pistols from abroad for the revolutionaries in India. All this was during the First World War (1914-18). During the Second World War (1939-45), Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose who was under arrest managed to escape in 1941. He went first to Germany and then to Japan. Indian soldiers had been sent to Burma, Malaya and Singapore to fight in the war. When Japan conquered these countries, Netaji formed the Indian National Army from among the Indian soldiers who had been captured by the Japanese or left behind by the British. He hoped to free India with this army. But the sudden end of the war and his own death upset the plan.

Let us now go back to our story. After the Partition of Bengal things became difficult for the British. They knew they could not



rule by force alone. The people were getting more and more dissatisfied and angry. So the British decided they should give at least some freedom to the people, and they introduced some changes.

At that time John Morley was the Secretary of State for India in the British Government in England. Minto was the Viceroy in India. So the changes were called the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. They actually amounted to very little. More Indians were admitted to the Legislative Assemblies. But very few members were elected by the people. There were many things they were not even allowed to discuss and the Government could continue to do as it liked. The most harmful thing was that the Reforms divided the Hindus and Muslims. Seats were reserved for Muslims in the Central Legislative Assembly and the voters for these seats were only Muslims. This was done because the British wanted to divide the people. United a people are strong; divided they are weak. A weak people can be easily ruled over. So the British wanted to divide the people, weaken them and rule over them. The reforms proposed were so disappointing that everybody felt that the Moderates who believed in the sincerity of the British had been misguided. The number of people who opposed and wanted to fight the British grew. In 1914 war broke out in Europe. The British made it an excuse to rule even more harshly. They said that during a war the nation's safety was more important than the people's freedom. If the enemy won, all freedom would be lost.

It was during the war, in 1915, that an Indian who had gone to South Africa to be a lawyer returned to India. He was destined to be a great leader of the Indian people for the next thirty years. He was to teach them to fight for freedom in a way which was different from all such fights anywhere or at any time in the past. This leader was Gandhiji.

He was a lovable man. He himself had nothing but love for everybody. He loved even those who attacked and abused him. He was also a great man and a wise man. Most important of all, he was a good man. He made the people think again and again about the reason they were doing what they were doing. If they were not clear about this, they would do everything wrong. The evils they

wanted to remove would continue. The Indian people claimed that they were a united people, one nation, and foreigners had no right to rule them. If that was so, he asked, why were the Hindus and Muslims often quarrelling? Why did high caste Hindus regard millions of their brothers, the Harijans, as untouchables? All his life, Gandhiji worked hard to bring the Hindus and Muslims together and to improve the condition of the Harijans. British indigo planters were oppressing the peasants and mill-owners were oppressing the workers. In 1917 Gandhiji went to Champaran in Bihar and worked hard to get some justice for the peasants. In 1918 he led a strike of mill-workers of Ahmedabad and also went on a fast till the mill-owners gave the workers a better wage. The British would have to go away sooner or later but there would be Indian landlords and Indian factory-owners. Would they not turn out to be equally harsh, Gandhiji asked. A change of heart was as important as winning freedom. In fact, without it, in place of foreigners who oppressed Indians, Indians would oppress their brothers. So he told the wealthy people that their wealth was a trust meant for the good of the whole nation.

But the first task was to see that foreign rule came to an end. Here Gandhiji's teaching was at first very difficult for the people to follow. He said that violence solved no problem. You should always resist oppression. But if you hated the oppressor bitterly and used violence against him, he would never stop to think how badly he had behaved; he would never have the chance to be sincerely sorry. He would be busy meeting your violence with his own violence. Furthermore, Gandhiji never believed that anybody was so bad that he could not change for the better. He also saw that while we were bitter about British injustice, we were ourselves often unjust in our dealings with other people.

Many people in India were attracted to Gandhiji's way of fighting for freedom. They joined him and became his followers. Later they became leaders in their own right. One of the very first to be drawn to Gandhiji was Rajendra Prasad. He was a young and successful lawyer in Patna. When Gandhiji went to Champaran to help the peasants to fight the tyranny of the indigo planters, Rajen Babu





went to help him. Later leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Motilal Nehru and his son Jawaharlal Nehru, joined Gandhiji.

Gandhiji rejected the idea that freedom can only be won through violence. But he was not willing to go on begging the British to give the people more rights. He decided to fight the British. His was a strange fight and it perhaps needed greater courage than that shown by the revolutionaries. Gandhiji would break the law if it was unjust. But he would not try to escape punishment. If the British beat him or sent him to prison he would endure this gladly. More important, he would not hate them. This was Gandhiji's method of Satyagraha. He had already tried it in South Africa where the white rulers treated the African people and the Indian settlers very harshly. On his return to India, Gandhiji patiently set about teaching us this great way of fighting without hating, winning without causing others to suffer. In the next thirty years he fought this strange type of battle again and again and the number of people following him increased every time.

One of the earliest of such battles showed how determined Gandhiji was to keep out violence. During the First World War, the British rulers took away the little freedom the people had. The Government arrested and punished people on mere suspicion. No one could speak or write freely. In 1917 the British announced some reforms. These were called the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. They made the vague promise that more powers would be given to the Indians, when they were fit for them. But when the war ended, instead of removing the war-time rules, the British passed the Rowlatt Acts continuing them. There were protest meetings all over India. On April 13, 1919, about twenty thousand people

including old men, women and children collected at Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar to hear their leaders speak on this repressive law. General Dyer, a British officer who wanted "to teach the Indians a lesson", arrived with his soldiers and without any warning opened fire on the crowd. Over a thousand people were killed and many more were wounded. Though this massacre shocked all India, Gandhiji stood firm in his faith that violence should be resisted non-violently. Again, in 1922 Gandhiji decided to launch a Satyagraha with masses of people peacefully breaking the law in one of the *taluks* of Gujarat—Bardoli. All the arrangements were made and everything was ready. But before the Bardoli mass civil disobedience actually started some people became violent at a place called Chauri Chaura in Uttar Pradesh. The police fired on them. They in turn set fire to the police station and some policemen died in the fire. Gandhiji immediately called off the Bardoli Satyagraha. Even his most loyal followers were very upset by this. But in course of time they realised how firm Gandhiji was in his principles and how great those principles were.

Six years later the Bardoli Satyagraha did take place. It is one of the famous episodes in India's struggle for independence. In 1928 the British raised the land revenue in Bardoli in Gujarat. Vallabhbhai Patel was a well-known lawyer. He was successful and was making a lot of money in his profession. When Gandhiji appealed to lawyers to boycott the British law courts Vallabhbhai Patel gave up his practice and joined the national movement. In 1928 Vallabhbhai Patel launched a no-tax campaign in Bardoli. The Governor of Bombay said that all the force of the Empire would be used to crush the campaign and make the peasants pay the tax. But eighty thousand peasants courageously resisted the repression encouraged by their Sardar (leader) and the British had to give in. After that Vallabhbhai came to be known as Sardar Patel and Bardoli was remembered as a landmark in India's freedom struggle.

The British were given another chance to be fair to the Indians. The Swaraj Party, under the leadership of C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru, offered to cooperate with them by taking part in the elections and joining the Legislative Councils in the provinces and the Assembly in the Centre.


But in 1926 the Swarajists decided to walk out of the Central Assembly. Motilal Nehru gave the reason: "The cooperation offered has been contemptuously rejected and it is time for us to think of other ways to achieve our object."

There were many important battles in this long war for independence. When the Indians said they could no longer wait and pressed for immediate self-rule the British tried to postpone matters by saying that they would appoint a Commission to find out whether Indians were fit to rule themselves. The Simon Commission came to India for this purpose in 1928. There were protests all over the country. Lala Lajpat Rai died of a police beating in one such protest meeting.

The time had come for a powerful nation-wide effort to win freedom. In 1929 the Congress met for its annual session at Lahore. Jawaharlal Nehru was elected President and the nation waited to see what the leaders would decide to do. This historic session announced the firm decision of the people of India that they would be satisfied with nothing less than *Purna Swaraj*—full and complete independence. No more reforms. No more compromise with offers of freedom step by step. On January 26, 1930 the people of India took a pledge to fight for independence. The Lahore Congress also decided to start another Satyagraha. This would be a mighty movement and Gandhiji would be its leader. All India would follow him and do what he asked them to do.

Gandhiji thought deeply for a long time and found a new way of breaking the law and offering Satyagraha.

British ships used to go to England heavily loaded with raw materials bought at low prices in India. They returned with machine-made goods for sale in our country and machinery for the British factories in India. This cargo was not heavy enough. Ships need to carry something heavy in their holds if they are to sail well. So the British filled the holds with salt and made Indians buy this salt at a high price. To see that no other salt was available, the British ordered that Indians should not make salt. But all along the long sea coast of India, anyone could make salt from sea water. This would have cost only one-twentieth of what the British were charging for their English salt. Gandhiji could teach great ideas in the simplest way.



He started a country-wide Satyagraha in 1930 by breaking the law against making salt from sea water. Defying this law Gandhiji marched to Dandi on the Gujarat coast to make salt. He was arrested. But the Satyagraha was in full swing all over India and thousands of men and women broke the law in a peaceful way to show how unjust British rule was.

From the time Britain began bringing her cheap machine-made goods and selling them in India, Indian leaders had realised that it would do the country great harm. Our own cottage industries handicrafts would be ruined. We would not be able to develop our own new machine-run industries. India would suffer and become poor. So the leaders said that the people should not buy foreign goods and should use only things made in India. In other words they should boycott or refuse to buy foreign goods and buy only





Indian or *swadeshi* (of our own country) goods. The first to realise the need to boycott foreign goods and use only *swadeshi* goods were Bholanath Chandra, Gopalrao Deshmukh, M. G. Randade, Rajnarain Bose and Tilak. At the time of the Partition of Bengal, the Boycott and Swadeshi Movement had become very popular and thousands joined it. Now Gandhiji took it up and used it to great effect. Gandhiji asked the people not to buy British goods, especially cloth. He asked them to use the *charkha* to spin cotton and to weave khadi on handlooms. He asked them to use only things produced in India. This Swadeshi Movement was a great success. Sweetmeat-makers refused to use foreign sugar, washermen refused to wash foreign clothes, women gave up foreign bangles and glass pensils, students would not use foreign paper. Indians started making all the things that were needed. Cottage industries sprang up to



make matches, soap, paper, pottery, and leather goods. Later, big industries grew up to make textiles, steel, and almost everything we needed.

In 1935 the British offered some more reforms. Elections would be held with more people having the right to vote. The elected leaders would form governments in the provinces. But the Governors were given large powers. They could refuse permission for any law they did not like even if it was passed by the elected leaders. They could also make laws on their own. The Congress did not like this but decided to try it out. They won the elections and Congress ministries were formed in many of the provinces in 1937. In the other provinces also ministries were formed by the elected leaders. But when the war broke out in 1939, the Congress ministries resigned. This was due to two reasons. One was that the British, without bothering to ask our leaders, declared that the Indian people were at war with the Germans. Secondly, as the British said that they were fighting to free the various European countries conquered by Germany, our leaders asked why the British should not make a beginning by giving freedom to India.

In 1942 the war became dangerous for India. By then Japan had entered the war against Britain and her allies. Since the British were keeping a lot of soldiers in India to fight Japan, Japan threatened to attack India. The Congress, therefore, launched the Quit India Movement. They asked the British to get out at once. This, of course, they did not do. Indian leaders were arrested and put in jail. The people were very angry and began fighting the Government in various ways. The Movement became as famous as the Revolt of 1857. The British rulers would not give in. They put down the Movement ruthlessly. Thousands of people were beaten up, fired upon and jailed.

After the war ended, the Labour Party came to power in Britain. They knew they could not continue to rule India by force. And many of them felt that they should not. Gandhiji had made the British realise how unjust they had been. The British Cabinet sent a mission to India to discuss the future.

Among the followers of Gandhiji were thousands of Muslim




leaders like Maulana Azad, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Dr Zakir Husain, who later became our President. In the early days, the British had tried hard to keep the Hindus and Muslims apart and make them quarrel. In 1905 Viceroy Curzon partitioned Bengal to separate the Muslims, who were in a majority in the eastern part, from the Hindus, who were in a majority in the western part. But when this was done both communities had united and their agitation against the Partition was so strong that the British had to annul it in 1911. Maulana Azad was a true Muslim and one day you may read his great writings on the Koran. He believed that true religion should unite people and not divide them. In his presidential address at the Ramgarh Session of the Congress in 1940 he said: "Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavour. The thousand years of our joint life have moulded us into a common nationality." But the Muslim League, led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, continued to claim that the Hindus and Muslims were two different peoples. Each must have a country of its own. They wanted India to be divided into two countries. Our leaders were very unhappy about this, but seeing the violent mood of the Muslim League, they agreed. Pakistan broke away from India.

In December 1929, Jawaharlal Nehru, as the President of the Lahore Session of the Congress, had moved the resolution that *Purna Swaraj* or full independence was India's goal. To Nehru, independence did not mean only freedom from foreign rule. And you must understand his ideas so that you can help in creating the new India that was his life-long dream. Independence meant seeing things through your own eyes, not through those of others. For example, in the history books written by Europeans which were the only history books Asians read in the past, the history of the world meant the history of Europe. In them nothing of importance to mankind seemed to have happened in any other part of the world. Jawaharlal's *Glimpses of World History* showed how wrong this view was. Written for his daughter, who is today our Prime Minister, it is meant for all children and you can learn of the great achievements of the

Chinese, Japanese, Islamic and Indian civilizations from it. But to Jawaharlal independence meant not only that you should not blindly accept other people's ideas about themselves but also that you should not have flattering ideas about yourselves if you did not deserve them. He said again and again that though India had achieved great things in the past, Indian people had fallen into many bad ways, believed in many superstitions and had lost the habit of working hard. He wanted India to turn more and more to science, not only because many of the scientific inventions could make life easier, but also because it would make people less superstitious. Jawaharlal felt that India should fight for the freedom of enslaved people all over the world. Poverty was in many ways like slavery and, therefore, we had to see that the poor people of our country were really free. In a midnight ceremony in the Constituent Assembly on August 15, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru and all our leaders dedicated themselves to realise these hopes for a free India. In a memorable speech Nehru said: "A moment comes which comes but rarely in history when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity."

Now a constitution had also to be worked out for our big country of many peoples, many traditions, many faiths. The Constituent Assembly worked very hard on this. Its President was Dr. Rajendra Prasad who later became the first President of India. He had worked with Gandhiji in fighting for the cause of the peasants of Champaran, organised relief work in Bihar after the terrible earthquake of 1934 and worked for communal harmony for many years. In his first address to the Constituent Assembly as its President, he said that the task before all of them was to frame "the Constitution of an independent and free India that will satisfy the people of all groups and communities and religions inhabiting this vast land and will ensure to everyone freedom of action, of thought, of belief, and of worship, which will guarantee to everyone opportunities of rising to his highest, which will guarantee to everyone freedom in all respects".

An abstract painting featuring thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of green, yellow, and orange. The composition is layered, with some colors appearing over others, creating a sense of depth and texture. The overall effect is vibrant and dynamic.

After the Lahore Congress of December 1929, people all over India had celebrated January 26, 1930 as Independence Day by taking the pledge of *Purna Swaraj*. And twenty years later, on January 26, 1950, India became a Sovereign Democratic Republic.





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